



Progress in Housing

Need for Housing

People with disabilities want to live in communities with decent, safe, affordable, and integrated housing of their choice. With a place to call home and with supportive services, people with disabilities can recover, become self-sufficient, and live valued roles in their families and communities. This Spotlight on Progress highlights recent accomplishments by the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services (Division or DMHDDSAS), local management entities (LMEs), the NC Department of Health and Human Services Office of Housing and Homelessness, and other stakeholders striving to meet the housing needs of the people we serve.



North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services
Division of Mental Health | Developmental Disabilities
Substance Abuse Services





The Role of the State, Division, LMEs, and Providers

North Carolina adopted and implemented strategies to address the housing issues for individuals with disabilities - establishing stakeholder coalitions for developing housing plans; initiating and taking advantage of federal, state, and local funding resources; and planning and funding the services to help promote the ability of people with disabilities to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities.

The State Has a Key Role in Promoting Supportive Housing

In the past, affordable housing was the concern of housing developers, public housing agencies, nonprofit community organizations, and local mental health agencies. Today the increasing focus on community-based housing with supports has caused housing and service providers at local, state, and federal levels to collaborate to develop housing options such as rental subsidies for tenants, incentives to landlords and developers, and fund supportive services to help people with their health and maintain residential stability.



DMHDDSAS Housing Specialist

The Division has one full-time housing specialist to address consumers' housing needs. On an ongoing basis, the Division's housing specialist provides technical assistance and training for the 27 local housing specialists at the 23 local management entities; represents the Division on state-level housing committees; helps support the development of housing resources and residential options; and promotes collaborations with community service providers and housing developers. The Division's housing specialist also manages the Division's contract with the Oxford House of North Carolina and develops informational materials including a consumer friendly housing brochure disseminated throughout the state. The brochure provides guidance for consumers, service providers, and LME customer service staff about housing options for consumers.

<http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/MHDDSAS/announce/2008/housing-0608.pdf>

Local housing specialists play an essential role assisting individuals with disabilities to access and housing...

Local Management Entities Housing Specialists

Local management entities and their housing specialists continue to perform a critical function as the local lead agencies to ensure consumers of public mental health, developmental disabilities, and substance abuse services have access to affordable housing and supportive services. Local housing specialists play an essential role assisting individuals with disabilities to access and housing through the Targeting Program, act as a liaison between targeted property



management and referral agencies, and work with referral agencies regarding tenant issues. The LME housing specialists provide ongoing training and information to providers. In 2008, the Division demonstrated continued support of the housing specialists at local management entities by providing funding for nine of the formerly unfunded housing specialist positions, and increased the funding amount allocated to local housing specialist positions. Currently, all 24 LMEs have at least one funded housing specialist position.

Activities of the LME Housing Specialists

- Serve as lead agency in local Housing Support Committees to help consumers get the support services needed for affordable housing
- Serve as lead agency in Housing 400 Initiative funded by NC General Assembly
- Develop and update a Strategic Housing Plan that includes an inventory of local, existing housing for consumers; housing needs of consumers; strategies for filling the gap between existing housing and housing needs; barriers to implementing those strategies; and ways to implement Strategic Housing Plan



- Educate consumers, families and service providers on accessing and maintaining affordable housing according to the NC Landlord-Tenant and Fair Housing laws and negotiate reasonable accommodations
- Develop a positive working relationship with local public housing authorities and local agencies administering U.S. Department Housing and Urban Development Section 8 to improve access and increase the supply of housing resources

What role do providers play in housing?

The Division's major focus is in assuring service providers throughout the public mental health, developmental disabilities, and substance abuse services system have knowledge of the different housing and supportive services options. Housing should be addressed in every person-centered plan through the public mental health, developmental disabilities, and substance abuse services system. Providers assess housing situations and address housing needs through the person-centered plans. By knowing the appropriate and available housing resources and housing developers in their communities, providers can refer consumers for housing (<http://www.ncdhhs.gov/mhddsas/pcp.htm>).



When DMHDDSAS is Contacted about Housing . . .

The Division's Customer Service and Community Rights Team responds to calls and letters about concerns and complaints from consumers and family members. Some callers request information to assist them with locating housing. The majority of the calls concern Medicaid-eligible adults with a mental illness diagnosis. However, the Division housing specialist routinely provides the Division's customer service staff with updates on housing resources and housing specialist resources.

Funding

The Division's housing specialist keeps up to date on funding available for housing and provides information to LME housing specialists. Funding sources currently available in NC to finance permanent supportive housing initiatives include:

- The Community Development Block Grant, Low Income Housing Tax Credits, Section 811 Supportive Housing for Persons with Disabilities, and the Medicaid Rehabilitative Services Option help fund housing supports.
- Low income housing tax credits, created by the Internal Revenue Service, help fund the single largest source of affordable rental housing in NC.
- The Targeting Program, a partnership between the NC Housing Finance Agency, NC Department of Health and Human Services, and local communities that began in 2002, requires owners of properties awarded Low Income Housing Tax Credits to target 10% of newly funded units to persons with disabilities.
- The Housing 400 Initiative is an expansion of the partnership between the NC Housing Finance Agency and the NC Department of Health and Human Services. In 2006 the General Assembly provided \$10.9 million in nonrecurring capital



funds to the Housing Trust Fund to increase the supply of independent and supportive living apartments for persons with disabilities including individuals with mental health, developmental disabilities, and substance abuse issues. The North Carolina General Assembly has appropriated nonrecurring funds to the Housing Trust Fund two additional times for the development of permanent, independent supportive housing. The first year of Housing 400 Initiative funding provided financing for 430 independent and supportive apartments in 33 counties. Over 2,200 units targeted to extremely low-income persons with disabilities who need supportive services to live independently have been funded through the Housing 400 Initiative and the Targeting Program that predated the Initiative.

- In 2004, the NC Department of Health and Human Services and the NC Housing Finance Agency partnered together using \$1 million from the NC Mental Health Trust Fund and \$1.2 million from the NC Housing Finance Agency (NCHFA) to establish the Key Operating Assistance Program to make Low Income Housing Tax Credit targeted units truly affordable for persons with disabilities by paying the difference between what a tenant on Supplemental Security Income can afford to pay and a Key payment standard set by the NCHFA and DHHS. In 2006, the NC General Assembly provided the first recurring appropriation for the Key Program (\$1.2 million) as part of the Housing 400 Initiative. Current recurring appropriations for Key Program operating assistance, administered through contract by the NC Housing Finance Agency, stand at \$6.55 million.



- The Homeless Mental Health Initiative Pilot project funded by the NC Mental Health Trust Fund in May 2007 through June 2009 focused on the homeless in Asheville, Durham and Guilford County. The initiative supported three full-time Housing Support Teams that target homeless individuals with mental illness; frequent use of public support systems; and cycle through psychiatric hospitals, treatment programs, jails and prisons.

Continued Focus on Homelessness

Cost benefit research shows homelessness and the lack of residential stability for persons with disabilities cost the state in many ways - dependence upon emergency interventions in health care and mental health systems, child and adult protective services, and jails and courtrooms. Homelessness and lack of residential stability contribute to high return to prisons and to dependence upon institutional and facility-based care. To truly impact chronic homelessness and living outside of state psychiatric facilities, affordable housing policies and supportive services must go hand in hand.

For 2010-2011, the Division anticipates receiving \$1,139,000 in federal funding through the Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) grant administered by the Center for Mental Health Services of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. The funding provides outreach and time-limited case management to individuals experiencing homelessness and have a serious mental



illness or co-occurring disorders. Priority is given to individuals who are literally homeless, living in woods, streets or buildings not suitable for living. PATH programs must meet non-profit status, and PATH programs are located in Durham, Wilmington, Fayetteville, Chapel Hill, Charlotte, Statesville, Asheville, and Winston-Salem. PATH programs match the federal funding with state, county or other non-federal funding.

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 included \$1.5 billion for a Homelessness Prevention Fund for communities to provide financial assistance and services to either prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless or help those who are experiencing homelessness to be quickly re-housed and stabilized. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development administers this federal program called the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP). In North Carolina, seven local communities received direct allocations. In addition, the balance of state program is administered by three state partners: the Office of Economic Recovery and Investment, Department of Health and Human Services, and NC Housing Finance Agency. Financial assistance for re-housing or homelessness prevention can include rental assistance up to 18 months.

In North Carolina, counties or regions must create Continuums of Care to apply for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) McKinney-Vento funds for homeless programs. McKinney-Vento funds can be used for permanent supportive housing and/or services. There are thirteen Continuum of

The Shelter Plus Care Program provides rental assistance for hard-to-serve homeless persons with disabilities in connection with supportive services funded from sources outside the program. Shelter Plus Care is designed to provide housing and supportive services on a long-term basis for homeless persons with disabilities – primarily those with serious mental illness, chronic problems with alcohol and/or drugs, and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) or related diseases.

Care groups in North Carolina (<http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/homeless/coc.htm>).

The Continuum of Care process helps organize and deliver housing and services to meet the needs of people who are homeless as they move to stable housing and achieve self-sufficiency. The Continuum of Care planning process includes specific action steps to end homelessness and prevent a return to homelessness. Since 1998, the Continuum of Care planning shifted gradually to local communities. In response, the NC Department of Health and Human Services and the Division provided technical assistance to local management entities to secure Shelter Plus Care housing opportunities for Division consumers. Many LME's have been critically involved in their community's application for federal Continuum of Care grants, sometimes taking the lead role in directly applying for funds. These local partnerships resulted in transitional housing and permanent housing as well as services for homeless people, including over 1,530 units of permanent housing. In 2009, the US Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded \$15,084,732 in grants to twelve North Carolina Continuum of Care programs. The awards included funding to support the McKinney Shelter Plus Care, and the McKinney Supportive Housing Program.

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Oxford Houses

Oxford Houses are democratically-run and self-supported houses for recovering substance abusers. The revolving loan fund is an important tool for starting Oxford Houses in North Carolina. The loan (up to \$4,000) covers costs such as first month's rent, rental deposits, and utility hookups. Houses repay the loans over a 24-month period. Since the first North Carolina Oxford Houses were established in 1999, the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services has provided financial assistance. To open new Oxford Houses and provide peer support, \$200,000 is available in annual recurring NC state appropriations and \$50,000 from the state's federal Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant. The Division contracts with Oxford Houses to provide services to consumers recovering from substance use disorders in a low-cost, peer supportive living environment.

From 2007 through March 2010, 27 new Oxford Houses opened in North Carolina. Today there are a total of 137 Oxford Houses in the state providing more than 1,000 beds (748-men, 246-women and 23-beds for women and their children).



Final Thoughts

Research shows the stability of supportive housing may benefit individuals in several ways such as greater satisfaction and reduced hospital days, more happiness, higher life satisfaction ratings and better chances at community success. Affordable housing policies and supportive services must go hand in hand to counter chronic homelessness and unnecessary hospital admissions. Research and common sense make it clear that supportive housing helps people with disabilities who desire to live in communities of their choice like everyone else.



State of North Carolina, Beverly Eaves Perdue, Governor
Department of Health and Human Services, Lanier M. Cansler, Secretary
Division of Mental Health | Developmental Disabilities | Substance Abuse Services, Lera Wainwright, Director